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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 005058

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [EG](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MFA MYSTIFIED BY AMBASSADOR IHAB SHERIF'S
KIDNAPPING

Classified by Charge Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Alaa Al-Hadidi of the Foreign Minister's Cabinet told poloff that, as of July 5, the GOE still had no firm clues as to the location of kidnapped Ambassador Ihab Sherif, who was heading Egypt's mission in Baghdad. Al-Hadidi further confirmed that no group has claimed responsibility. He did, however, observe that Sherif's kidnapping, in combination with the assassination attempt on the Bahraini Charge and a reported explosion near the Iranian Embassy, raised concern of a possible "concerted campaign against Muslim diplomats." Al-Hadidi promised to keep the Embassy apprised of further developments. Charge had earlier talked to a senior member of the MFA Cabinet to express concern over the kidnapping and later with the Foreign Minister's Chief of Staff (FM Aboul Gheit was in Libya for the AU Summit). Post understands that vigorous efforts to locate Sherif and identify his captors are underway via alternate channels.

2. (U) Public reactions to the kidnapping have included anger at Sherif for exposing himself to danger and anger at the MFA for failing to guarantee the Ambassador's security or prepare him adequately for his mission. All Egyptian media outlets carried the basic news of Sherif's abduction in their July 3 and 4 editions, including a statement by the Shura Council of Arab Affairs Committee head, Mohamed Bassyouni, that the kidnapping was a message to Egypt to curb its role in rebuilding Iraq. Meanwhile, television programs and editorial pages analyzed the event for its possible outcomes and the message the abduction sent to Egypt.

3. (U) On the popular Channel 2 program, El Beit Beitik, Naguib Sawiris, whose Orascom employees have previously been victims of kidnappings in Iraq, offered comfort to Sherif's family, saying he thought the situation would end peacefully. He suggested the kidnappers would eventually ask for a ransom, as they did with Orascom employees. On Dream TV, the Vice Chairman of the Egyptian Foreign Relations Council pointed out that the motives for the kidnapping were not clear, but noted that in dangerous countries, such as Iraq, tighter security measures should be implemented for Egyptian diplomats. On Nile TV, political analyst Mohamed Wahbi accused Sunnis unhappy with the Iraqi government of the kidnapping, while political science professor Moustafa Kamel El-Sayyed accused the GOE of unwisely sending an ambassador to an unstable Iraq.

4. (U) In the pro-government Al Ahram (circulation: 750,000), columnist Dr. Abdel Atti Mohammed speculated that the kidnapping was an attempt to derail any initiative to integrate Sunnis into the political process in Iraq. However, he said, this attempt was misguided, as Egypt's decision to send an ambassador was in Iraq's interest. He also called on the Americans and Europeans to help win the release of Sherif if they want more Arab ambassadors to go to Iraq. Refiqi Fakry, a columnist in the pro-government Al Akhbar (circulation: 800,000) agreed that the kidnapping was not in Iraq's interest. He wrote that those responsible for the kidnapping should not be so ungrateful for the Egyptian role in rebuilding Iraq, and should immediately release Sherif.

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CORBIN